Doctor Johnson in Cambridge

By *S. C. Roberts*

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Doctor Johnson in Cambridge

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
THE STORY OF
DOCTOR JOHNSON

Doctor Johnson in Cambridge

Essays in Boswellian Imitation

By S. C. ROBERTS

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May Week

I HAD for many years entertained the hope that Dr Johnson would one day come with me and visit Cambridge at that season of the academick year which, as I had been informed by my friend, Mr Temple, was known to the students as May Week.

"Sir," I said to him one evening, as we were returning from the Mitre, "your education was, as I am aware, received at Oxford, but as a liberal-minded man, you would surely acquire both pleasure and profit from a visit to another institution similarly celebrated for its piety and learning."

"Sir," he replied, "never accustom your mind to mingle the pursuit of learning with a desire for a frolick. Some Cambridge men are scholars, though there has been mighty exaggeration of the merits of their poetry. But as to this May Week, let us hear no more on't. For the young dogs of the age, it may be well enough; but it befits neither

my advancing years nor your own married state. In addition, I am engaged to Mrs Williams not to leave London during May."

BOSWELL. But, Sir, the visit I have proposed would not be until the second week in June.

JOHNSON. Then, Sir, be good enough to make an end of this trifling. I see neither wit nor meaning in a man naming the month of May when he intends the middle of June —unless (*smiling*) it be an engagement for the payment of a debt or the delivery of a manuscript.

We mounted the Cambridge coach at the White Horse in Fetter-lane, and I exulted in the thought that I now had the sage, the philosophick Rambler, actually embarked upon an expedition of frivolity.

The Master of Emmanuel College, worthy successour of Dr Johnson's old friend, Dr Farmer, and at that time Vice-Chancellour of the University, received us most cordially.

At dinner in the college hall, after the recital of a long grace in Latin, Dr Johnson pronounced *Amen* with much fervour, which seemed, as I thought, to surprise some of the younger of those present.

As was his custom at that time, he drank only lemonade. By some accident, however, the waiter mistook his wishes and brought him a tankard of college ale. Johnson curtly declining it, I, in pity for the man's confusion, bade him set it down beside my own. As I looked down the rows of eager-faced, laughing students, my spirits rose.

After dinner there was tea ready for Johnson in the college parlour, a mark of attention with which he was visibly pleased. The Vice-Chancellour, perceiving, I suppose, my elation of feeling, turned to Johnson and said: "Your friend Mr Boswell seems in high spirits to-night." "Ay," said Johnson, "he would tell you it is because he is nearer by fifty miles to Scotland than he was this morning."

This approach to one of Johnson's favourite topicks made me uneasy, since I had not ventured to inform him of our host's nationality. Seeking to keep both these good men in amity, I turned to the Vice-Chancellour and broke in hastily:

"Sir, you must know that Dr Johnson has received the freedom of the city of Aberdeen."

JOHNSON. Sir, what has that to do with it? It is true that the Latin in which it was presented was good—I think it must have been learned at Oxford.

We talked of the honorary degrees that were soon to be conferred upon members of the ministry and others. One of those present, a clergyman, expressed his gratification that one of the statesmen to be thus honoured was of the Labour party.

"Poh," said Johnson, "let us have no more of that. 'Labour' is the last refuge of an idler."

Upon the following afternoon I prevailed upon my illustrious friend to come with me to see the boatraces.

We talked with a young friend of mine, elegantly dressed in a jacket embroidered with the arms of his college. Dr Johnson, learning that he was of Pembroke, told him that it was a very good name for a college and enquired of him whether he preferred the writing of verses or the exercise of rowing. The young man modestly replying that he wrote very indifferent verses, Dr Johnson said, "You are not the first of your college to do that." He then turned to the subject of rowing, arguing for the superiority of

sliding over fixed seats and remarking that it seemed to him that the rowers in a certain boat did not propel their hands forward with sufficient celerity. He made a very good figure on these topicks.

After the first bout of rowing contests, we stepped on to a small open boat, steered by an old man with a long pole. I had imagined that only two or three would be allowed to embark at once, but to my dismay a crowd of persons of both sexes continued to leap on board with great agility till the little craft swayed this way and that, the water trickling in over the side in an alarming fashion. The sight of Johnson standing fearless on the prow helped me to compose my mind a little and I was pleased to assist one of the ladies to steady herself against the frequent rollings of the little vessel. I bade her cling to me and not be afraid. Landed on the opposite bank, we found what seemed to be a country fair in progress. My eye was caught by a mechanical contrivance round which a gay company, seated on figures curiously fashioned as ostriches, revolved at great speed. I enquired of the Rambler whether he would mount the machine with me.

"Sir," he replied, "I take no pleasure in unnatural giddiness," but hearing a showman urge a number of young men to demonstrate their strength by swinging a heavy wooden mallet so as to make a certain bell ring, Johnson remarked: "Poh, I could do it with one hand," which feat amidst many plaudits and cries of "Old sportsman" he successfully performed.

Walking along the King's-parade with my friend on Saturday evening, I felt a rich glow within me at being in the midst of the spontaneous gayety of college life. Young men in twos and threes went rollicking past us, full of lively greeting and comradeship, having dined with their fellows in celebration of their successes in boating. One, more frolicksome than the rest, came up to me and though I had not, to the best of my knowledge, spoken with him before, shook me cordially by the hand and, after an exchange of good wishes, seized the hat I was wearing and put his own college cap on my head. Not at all displeased with this pleasantry, I was about to make some remark to Johnson, when I turned and found myself addressed by a decent, grave man in spectacles

and white bands, who politely enquired as to my name and college.

I was about to reply when Johnson burst out with a laugh: "Why, sir, he's no scholar. He's been idle all his life and he brought me up here to be idle for a few days with him. He has not sufficient Greek to be *admitted* here."

"Sir," said the Proctor coldly, "you are mistaken. Greek is unnecessary." Johnson gave him a significant look, but made no answer. It was the first time I had known him at a loss.

The Women's Question

MY esteemed friend had appeared to be so much gratified by his previous visit to Cambridge that some few months later I again approached him on that topick.

"Sir," said I, "the season of the London fog is upon us. Even as I came here to wait upon you, I bruised myself in suddenly encountering a tree. Cannot I persuade you to make a journey out of the metropolis with me?"

JOHNSON. No, Sir, you cannot. If I choose to go, that's another matter. I am sick of this pother about the air of London. It is good enough for me, even if I cannot see the trees through the fog; and for a Scotchman I cannot see what difference it can make, since in his own country he is used to see no trees at all.

Having delivered himself of a thrust against my country, Johnson, as I knew, would be in better humour, so I was emboldened to pursue my task.

"That was a pleasant journey," I said, "we made to Cambridge in the summer."

"Ay, it was well enough," he replied; "young men are much the same everywhere."

Seeing him thus mollified, I was too well versed in stratagem to press my advantage unduly or to inform him of my real reason for desiring to visit Cambridge at this time. For I had news from my friends that the great controversy of the admittance of females to that seat of learning was soon to be decided.

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Dr Farmer's successour was again our host and received us with extreme cordiality. At dinner we talked upon general topicks, Johnson so far relaxing his strict habits of abstinence on this occasion as to call for audit ale. "Come (said he), let me know what it is that makes an undergraduate happy." Having tasted it, he conveyed to me in an undertone that it was not so good as the ale brewed in Lichfield when he was a boy. For my own part, having tasted of both, I was in no mood to decry the excellences of either of those liquors.

As we sate in the parlour, however, I

could not but feel a presentiment as of some controversial spectre whose embodiment we might at any moment behold.

It turned out as I feared. One of the younger of those present, turning towards Johnson, asked him with an engaging smile: "What would you think, Dr Johnson, if it were suggested that women should become members of this University?"

"Sir," said he, "I am as fond of talk as any man, but in order to begin a good argument it is not necessary that the primary supposition should be ridiculous."

"But, Sir, it is not ridiculous. We shall next week make our decision upon this very question."

I could see the veins beginning to swell on the illustrious countenance of my friend and endeavoured to interpose.

BOSWELL. Sir, Dr Johnson has a high opinion of the female understanding but—

JOHNSON (*breaking in*). Sir, when I am required to offer my opinion of the female intellect or of any other trifle, I am capable of giving it myself. (*Turning to the Master*) May I enquire, Sir, whether it is really conceivable that when next you are so good as

to offer me the hospitality of this place, there may be women in the precincts?

THE MASTER. That is hardly for me to determine. All I may say is that I trust the matter may quickly be settled one way or the other.

JOHNSON. But it may be conjectured that, on a future visit, I may find myself seated for dinner next a female?

At this point the whole company broke into protestations of denial, and the Master explained to Johnson that not even the most violent of the academick Whigs proposed such an admixture of the sexes within the gates of the colleges. Johnson, however, still appeared to be somewhat puzzled.

"Sir," said he, addressing the Master, "I am at a loss to understand this matter. The life of a University is in its colleges. A woman may be none the worse for a little learning, but a man's pursuit of his studies should be conducted independently."

Here one of the younger of the guests, lately knighted for certain diplomatick services, interposed:

"My dear Sir, that is the precise distinction which some of us have been at pains

to emphasise. We deny education to none, but we claim independence—independence for both of the sexes."

"How do you mean, Sir, for both?"

"By a federation of the two, Sir, within one institution."

"Let us get this point clear. Would you then have women to be members of this University?"

"Why, yes, Sir, but—"

JOHNSON. Sir, I am still more at a loss. Though you stand firm for independence, you seem to me to surrender the main fortress. I have known women to cut a tolerable figure in conversation, though none of them has yet written a good cookery book; I will confess that I have derived entertainment from a meeting of *Blue-Stockings*, but co-operation with men in the general course of study (as, for example, in chymical investigation) is very indelicate in a female.

"As to that," said another of the company, "one of my lady pupils observed to me only to-day that—"

"How do you say, Sir," asked Johnson, astonished. "Are you gone so far that you have already undertaken the instruction of females?"

"Why, Sir," the other replied, "they have been in this place for nigh upon fifty years."

Dr Johnson turned to me.

"Mr Boswell," he said in his best manner, "you dragged me from London to escape the incommodities of a fog. I am now involved in a deeper fog of argument than I can ever remember. Here your atmosphere is of too metaphysical a kind for me. To-morrow we will try the air of Oxford."

At this there was a general silence, all the company regarding each other in an uncomfortable manner. At length the Master, turning to Johnson, said to him kindly, yet with some hesitation: "Dr Johnson, it is but right for me to warn you against what may be still more contrary to your expectation. What we have talked of here to-night hath in Oxford already been accomplisht."

Johnson gave him a significant look. "Sir," he said, "I am indeed sensible of your hospitality. But, having brought me out of Fleet Street against my own inclination, Boz here shall take me back thither by the early coach to-morrow—besides, I am engaged on the day following to discuss a matter of some consequence with Mrs Thrale."

The Union

WAITING upon Johnson about noon upon the day following our conversation at the club, I found him at breakfast with his queer friend, Mr Levett. He gave a curt reply to my greeting and I perceived him to be preoccupied over some matter.

"Well, Sir," said I, "what is your news?"

For answer he handed a letter to me. Judging that it might be one of his frequent communications from the Thrale family, I regarded it at first with little interest, though I felt a certain glow of satisfaction at being thus admitted into the privacy of my illustrious friend's correspondence. But my satisfaction increased to jubilation when I perceived the letter to bear the arms of the University of Cambridge and to contain an invitation to Johnson to be present at a meeting of the Union debating club: I rejoiced to find that the little negociation with my friend Mr Temple had been successful.

"Sir," I said, "this will be a great honour."

"For whom, Sir?"

"For you, Sir—and for the debating club," I added quickly. "I had not hoped for it so soon."

I perceived that I had said too much, for Johnson looked sharply up at me:

"So you were at the bottom of this. Well, Sir, as you have taken upon yourself to dictate this letter, you may now oblige me by composing a refusal."

"Nay, Sir, but you are my dictator."

Johnson, catching my reference to the conversation at the club on the previous evening, softened a little and asked to see the letter again, since, as he said, he had not troubled to do more than glance at it: which, indeed, soon became evident, for when he came to that part wherein the topick for debate (namely, the need for the safe-guarding of liberty) was suggested, "Poh," cried he in indignation, "what can these puppies know of government that they are ready to yelp so loud for liberty?"

BOSWELL. But, Sir, you are requested to argue against such a motion.

JOHNSON. Sir, I perceive that, like all the young dogs of this age, your Cambridge men

are infected by a vile Whiggery. Still, if they could talk tightly on a subject, I have a mind to go and tell them that their masters did not whip them well enough at school—Frank (*turning to the door*), my new travelling-coat!

BOSWELL. But, Sir, you cannot start—

JOHNSON. Sir, do you think I have no appointments but with your Cambridge boobies? I am engaged to Mrs Thrale in half an hour.

A little hurt at this, I nevertheless felt encouraged, as I took my leave, to write to Temple informing him of the success of our plan.

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It was about a quarter before 7 o'clock as we set out from our inn (a good old-fashioned one with a spacious court-yard) and made our way to the debating club. The students, in every variety of gay costume, thronged the narrow streets, and we observed with surprise the number and swiftness of the velocipedes; Dr Johnson commented also upon the stridency of their horns and upon their malodorous discharge. "I never thought," he said to me, "to walk through a street more smelly than yours at Edinburgh."

As we approached the passage that leads to the Union club, Johnson espied a curiously-built church in front of us. His passion for architectural investigation was at once aroused; in spite of my warning that we were already late, he insisted on going inside, noting the Norman style of ornamentation and asking how it appeared to me to compare with the Temple church in London. I confessed that I was unable to bring my mind to the matter, reminding him instead that we were engaged to dine with the President of the debating club.

"Sir," he said, "You are a luxurious dog. Here is a Christian monument that has stood for centuries, but because you think your dinner is getting cold, you have no eyes for it."

I was about to reply that we had our duties as guests, but, thinking it better to say nothing, led him gently to the entrance-door of the club.

We were shewn into a small room where a number of eager-faced young men and a few seniors were assembled. One of the elder of those present, a grave and courteous man with an obliging manner, at once came forward and relieved me of my hat.

"Mr President," I began, "I fear that we—."

As I was beginning to speak, however, I observed a look of amusement in the eyes of the young men around me, and after a few moments of confusion, it was explained that I had been addressing the chief clerk and *factotum* of the club—a mistake at which Johnson laughed louder than any. However, the real President, stepping forward and saying to me very kindly "A very natural error, Mr Boswell," we all moved off to the dining-room in great good humour.

At dinner I was unfortunately separated from Johnson and was not able to take note of his conversation. I was gratified, however, to observe with what attentiveness his wants were waited upon. "Dr Johnson will take lemonade," I heard the President say to the waiter, "and with some ice in it." I was myself enjoying a bottle of good French wine and remarked to my neighbour, "He would be a bold man who would first break the ice with Dr Johnson"; he replied, "Yes, quite," but did not seem to catch the point of my remark.

Conversation after dinner was cut short,

as it was necessary to proceed without delay to the debating hall. My spirits rose as we entered to the accompaniment of hearty hand-clapping mingled with huzzahs, and I noted with pleasure the gay dresses of the ladies who were present in the gallery—a bright contrast to the academick gowns worn by the students in the hall below.

The argument was opened by a young man of attractive bearing, who dilated with such skill upon the principles of Liberty that, had I not been convinced of the dangerous character of the subject-matter of the speech, I might almost have been persuaded by his charm of manner.

I said as much in a whisper to Johnson.

"Poh," he replied, "when I was a boy I always chose the wrong side of a debate."

The second in order of speaking was Johnson himself, and, using the arguments that were to me already familiar by reason of our long intercourse, he clearly revealed the fallacious character of the previous speech, dwelling especially upon the confusion, prevalent in many minds, between *individual* and *universal* liberty. Everyone listened with the closest attention and I was especially

pleased to observe that when he sate down the applause was accorded not only by those supporting him in the debate, but with equal heartiness by those on the opposite benches.

The speaker who followed pleased me less than the first. Rather unwisely he made more than once a satirical reference to Johnson's well-known prejudices in political matters and I foresaw that this would be too much for my friend to bear in silence; at length, indeed, he cried out in an angry tone: "No, Sir, that is not true."

One or two members near me whispered "Order, order," and fearful of what might ensue, I got up and began as persuasively as I could: "Mr President, Sir, I am afraid my friend—." But instead of soothing matters, I seemed only to produce a greater uproar about me. The cries of "Order, order" were repeated in a louder tone and Johnson bawled at me "Sit down, you blockhead, sit down!" Most terrifying of all, there came upon my ears, as if from nowhere, the sound of a clangorous bell. At this, the shouting subsided and the President rose: "I am afraid," he said with great dignity, "that the rules of the Society do not allow interruptions except

upon points of personal explanation and then only from speakers who have already addressed the House."

Confused and somewhat abashed, I sank back into my seat; but Johnson immediately rose:

"Sir," he said with great geniality, "I beg leave to offer my explanations: I come from London taverns, where I am used to have my talk out and then to interrupt when I like; my friend here comes from Scotland which, as everyone knows, is not a civilised country."

There was a general laugh at this characteristical sally, and the debate proceeded smoothly; when the votes were counted, it appeared that the motion was lost.

The President came forward to congratulate Dr Johnson on the part he had played in procuring this result.

"Sir," replied Johnson, "I am accustomed to talk for victory."

Two Centenaries

"SIR," said Dr Johnson, "your Cambridge men must be a set of idle dogs." I could not help reflecting that my friend's account of his own college days savoured little of close application to study. I therefore ventured to rally him:

"Come, Sir," said I, "have you not delineated your own character at Oxford as a lounger round Pembroke-gate?"

"Sir," said he, "that was a different matter. Certain frolicks may be allowed to youth. I am speaking now of the gayeties in which senior members of a University—decent, sober, academick people whose age should teach them better—think fit to indulge themselves. What is the sense in all this pother about anniversaries? These Cambridge folk seem unable to empty their heads of it: first, it is because some foreigner set up a printing-press in their town 400 years ago; and then they must needs make merry because their whelps have talked nonsense at

their Union club for 100 years without stopping."

My friend Mr Temple having apprised me of these celebrations and having indeed exercised his influence to procure cards of invitation for me, I had secretly hoped that Dr Johnson might be prevailed upon to make another journey to Cambridge. But so far I had not ventured to approach him. His next remark, therefore, came as a gratifying surprise.

"I have a mind," he said, "to go"; and with this he exhibited to me two cards, one from the Vice-Chancellour and the Syndicks of the Press, the other from the Chairman of the Debating Club.

It has been my privilege to be present at a variety of scenes in the company of my illustrious friend, but there are few that have been worthy of comparison, in brilliancy of entertainment, with the two banquets at which I was now enabled to attend.

In the ante-room of the ancient college where we were assembled immediately before the Printing celebration, it was highly gratifying to observe how amongst such a distinguished assemblage Dr Johnson ap-

peared one of the most prominent figures. Several gentlemen, wearing their robes of academical scarlet, honoured me by saying: "Sir, I think you must be Mr Boswell. Will you have the goodness to present me to Mr Johnson?"—a duty which I performed with the greatest satisfaction and alacrity.

One of the professors who made this request of me proved to be a Scotchman. "Ha, Dr Johnson," said he, "I saw you last as a freeman of the city of Aberdeen." I was a little apprehensive of what might ensue, but Johnson courteously replied: "Sir, it is generous of you to acknowledge me, since I am no longer wearing my diploma."

What gave Johnson especial pleasure, however, was to find among the guests a number of friends from his own University. One tall Oxford scholar in particular, accompanied by two other gentlemen (they belonged, as I afterwards ascertained, to that Cambridge college which bears the same name as Johnson's in Oxford), plied him with questions concerning his *Journey to the Western Islands*. They were, it seemed, perplexed as to the two impressions of that work which appeared in the first year of publication, and

enquired of Johnson why the words "Second edition" were omitted from the title-page of the later issue. "Indolence, gentlemen—pure indolence" was all the answer he would vouchsafe.

When we sate down for dinner, Johnson remained for some time with his attention fixed upon the card which lay upon his plate, not so much in eagerness to learn of what viands we were to partake, as to remark the antiquarian and typographical skill which it displayed. He expressed a particular interest in the representation of a title-page which exhibited the first Greek type used in England, "I am reminded," he said, "of a quarto I saw in Blenheim library—a *Grammar* of Lascaris, I think it was, the first book that was ever printed in that language. Mr Boswell (*leaning across the table to me*), your Scotchmen cannot shew anything like that." "Sir," I cried, "you are mistaken. We Scotchmen are famous printers. There are here to-night many countrymen of mine eminent in that profession." "Ay," said Johnson, "printing may save even Scotland from remaining a barbarous country."

By the time that the speeches began, I felt

myself aglow with the noble academick spirit of the place. I listened at first attentively to the learned Vice-Chancellour of Oxford, but afterwards I fear that my attention must have wandered. I consoled myself with libations of College port.

Later, I have a recollection of being regaled with lively conversation in the rooms of an agreeable young man, who proffered me a glass of that beverage which is characteristick of my own country. I was too polite to refuse, and it was with some difficulty that I made my way through the narrow and unfamiliar streets to Mr Temple's lodgings.

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At the Union club we were greeted with great cordiality by the chief clerk, whom this time I quickly recognized. He reminded me of my previous mistake, over which we heartily laughed, and led us into a spacious library where we were presented to the officers of the club. Johnson had no sooner made his bow than he proceeded straight to the books. In the crowd of people present, I quickly lost sight of my friend, and after some agreeable talk, we all moved towards

the dining room. I looked round anxiously for Johnson, but he was nowhere to be seen. I waited until nearly everyone had left, and then I happened by good fortune to recognize Dr Farmer's successour, whose genial hospitality on a previous occasion I well remembered. "Oh, Sir," said I, "have you seen Dr Johnson?" "No," he replied, "but I should indeed be gratified to do so." "Then, Sir," said I, "I beg you to help me find him. I am convinced that he is absorbed in the contemplation of some book that he has discovered here." We went off together, and my surmise proved to be correct. "Dr Johnson," said I, "I implore you to come. All the company has moved upstairs to dinner." "Why, Sir," he replied, "is dinner then served?" "No, Sir," said I, "but—" "Why then, Sir, do you bother me? There are some very good books here, and I do not care to go up to vacuity."

He was, however, persuaded to go with us and we found ourselves the last to enter the room except the President himself and his chief guest, who was none other than the Duke of York. We had barely found our seats when His Royal Highness entered and

I shall never forget the bow with which Johnson greeted the Duke as he took his seat nearly opposite to us. I had, on an earlier occasion, seen him pay his respect to an Archbishop, but it was as nothing compared with the profound obeisance he now performed. The presence of the late Speaker of the House of Commons also gave Johnson great satisfaction: "My Lord," he said, "it was your fate to listen to many speeches in that place; but in my younger days my lot was still harder—I had to write them."

Dinner over, we went down to the hall. Before the opening of the formal debate, many graceful speeches were delivered in felicitation of the anniversary. Johnson listened with deep attention until they were finished, when we were all taken aback by the sounds of a growing murmur in the hall which gradually developed into a rhythmical chant: "We want—DOCTOR JOHNSON." Johnson, as I could see, looked somewhat dismayed, but the chant grew in volume, and at length the President made a sign to Johnson, who rose in his seat.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is obliging of you to wish me to address you, but it is a

task that I shall not undertake. You have been honoured with the congratulations of my own and other Universities; you have heard with delight your oldest member; above all, you have been privileged to listen to His Royal Highness. Sir (*turning to the presidential chair*), it is not for me to bandy civilities with the son of my Sovereign."

The Royal Commission

I DINED with Johnson at the Mitre, and, finding him to be in a mood for animated conversation, went off with him, in high spirits, to the Club. I had recently been in correspondence with my friend Mr Temple, of Cambridge, and the Report of His Majesty's Commission, which had long deliberated upon the antient Universities, had formed a frequent epistolary topick between us. I could not but feel that this would be a subject large enough to give an ample scope to the Rambler's massive intelligence, and I determined to seek an early opportunity of introducing it into the conversation.

Mr Burke had animadverted upon the stability that an institution may derive from the consolidatory force of its traditions. This gave me the opening which I desired.

"Sir," said I, turning to Dr Johnson, "tradition is nowhere stronger than in the Universities. Have you seen the Report of the Commission?"

"Sir," he replied, "if you must ply me with idle questions, pray be good enough to be more explicit. What Commission is this? The last that I remember to have been given in this club was when I was entrusted with a commission to obtain another hogshead of claret from our friend the Dean. But I see no reason for a report upon that. At any rate I shall make none."

I was not to be put off by this raillery.

"But, Sir," said I, "you have surely heard of the Commission charged to enquire into the condition of Oxford and Cambridge? It is a body appointed by the King himself."

Johnson seemed a little abashed at this.

"It is not for me," he said, "to quarrel with his Majesty's appointments; but I have never been a great friend to Government and I will wager that there is some rascally political trick at the bottom of it. Who are the members, pray?"

In some trepidation I recounted a few of the names, beginning with that of a former Prime Minister, who had served in the capacity of chairman. But before I had mentioned half-a-dozen, Johnson broke in:

"It is what I expected—a pack of Whig

dogs turned loose upon the antient sheep-folds of learning. They may bark loud enough but (*smiling*) they may not find the sheep as docile as they imagine. But come, tell us what your Commission has done!"

BOSWELL. It has not *done* anything yet, Sir.

JOHNSON. I can believe that.

BOSWELL. But, as I am informed by Mr Temple, it proposes certain changes which may be of far-reaching benefit and importance.

JOHNSON. Sir, the notion that change must necessarily be beneficial is false.

BOSWELL. Well, Sir, it is proposed that the legislative power in the Universities should in effect be confined to the resident members.

JOHNSON. Ho, ho (*blowing in great derision*), this is a fine display of Whiggish doctrine. Why is it that those who yelp the loudest for government by the people are always the most eager to weaken the popular vote?

BOSWELL. Nay, Sir, but the whole body of members will still have power to reject a measure.

JOHNSON. Sir, I do not understand. Power must be in the hands of one body or the other.

By this time I was becoming a little confused by the rapid buffeting of the argument, and I was grateful when another who was present came to my aid.

"As I understand it," said he, "the Residents will be able to bring forward a rejected measure a second time and that it will thereupon take effect as if it had been passed."

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "never accustom your mind to mingle pretence with practice. If I command a veal-pye for dinner and the waiter refuses to serve it, but on my calling for it a second time (and more loudly) the pye appears at length upon the table, what benefit is derived from the delay—except that I have been put out of humour and the dish allowed to get cold? No, Sir, there can be no honesty in Whiggism."

Fearing to let Johnson enlarge upon this controversial topick, I hastened to steer the conversation into a more agreeable channel. I recollected that on a previous occasion my illustrious friend had expressed to me a wish that "there were many places of a thousand

a-year at Oxford, to keep first-rate men of learning from quitting the University," and it was therefore with greater confidence that I brought to his observation the Commissioners' demand for the payment of better stipends to University teachers and lecturers, with a particular view to the facilitating of research and advanced study.

"Ay," said Johnson, "that is but just. The teacher's lot is a hard one—especially (*turning to Garrick*) with whelps like young Davy there."

At this point Mr Gibbon, with his customary sneer, remarked that the only researches which he could remember to have been undertaken by the Fellows of Magdalen were their deep investigations into the contents of the college wine-bins.

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "that proves nothing. If a Fellow of a college chooses to take wine and tobacco, who are we to deny him those sweeteners of existence? At Oxford I was a poor man and an idle rogue. Yet the tutor treated us as though we had been his sons."

Dr Johnson having thus broached the somewhat delicate topick of his own early

poverty, I felt emboldened to remind him that the Commissioners had paid a particular attention to the lot of the penurious student.

"Ah," said Johnson, "they may talk amiably enough, but what help do they promise him?"

At the moment, the fumes of the punch having temporarily confused my powers of recollection, I was unable to recall any specifick proposal save that relating to the diminution of laundry charges. I mentioned this.

"Poh," said Johnson, "it is the first time I have known a party of Whigs throw themselves into a passion for clean linen."

"But, Sir," said I, "there is much more than that. I have a copy of the Report in my chambers. Indeed, it makes a book of tolerable size. I will bring it to-morrow so that you may read it through."

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "I *never* read books through."

The University Library

"SIR," said Dr Johnson, as we sate together one evening at the Mitre, "there is nothing I love better than a good library."

Mr Garrick, having in mind no doubt the treatment of his own *Petrarca* on a particular occasion, whispered to me that he should be sorry to entrust any rare editions to Johnson's care. Somewhat to my dismay, this remark was overheard by Johnson himself.

"What's that, Davy?" he bawled out, "You young dogs have no reverence for the instructors who first taught you to love reading."

"Sir," said Garrick, "I will not dispute the efficacy of beating a schoolboy, but I do not see that there is a corresponding value in the buffeting of books."

Having seen my illustrious friend more than once in the midst of the somewhat violent process of putting his books in order, I could not but feel that Garrick's retort was

just and I ventured to say that every lover of books liked to treat them in his own way.

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "you are confounding two separate things. I was not speaking of the few rows of volumes such as a man may have for himself, but of the great libraries of the kingdom where you are dealing not with a parcel of texts and sermons, but of riches beyond the dreams of bibliophiles."

Garrick sate silent at this, but a lively idea occurred to my mind and I resolved to use this expression of admiration for great libraries towards inducing my friend to make another visit to Cambridge.

As we walked home, I gently approached the topick. At first he was, as usual, obdurate in his refusal, but when I reminded him that he might, on the way back, pay a visit to his servant Frank who was at that time at school at Bishop Stortford, he softened a little; and when, a week later, I shewed him a cordial letter from my friend Temple engaging in a most friendly way to conduct us round each of the principal chambers of the University Library, he finally agreed that

I should take places in the coach for the following Tuesday.

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At the entrance to the Library, which appeared to me to be rather cramped and lacking in dignity for so venerable a building, an unfortunate mishap occurred of which I, in an earnest attempt to save my friend from disaster, was myself the innocent victim.

When we had passed through the outer doors, I perceived that the entrance was barred by a curiously-contrived mechanick device known as a turnstile. Johnson saw nothing of this and was about to charge straight down upon the obstruction when I, fearing either that the sudden impact might seriously bruise his person or that his great bulk might become firmly wedged in the exiguous opening, stretched my hand forward to warn him of what was in front. In doing so, however, my heel slipped on a grating and, instead of rescuing my friend from danger, I found myself violently precipitated on the floor with the echoes of Johnson's laughter in my ears.

"Here is a clumsy fellow," said he, turning to Temple, "he sets out to shew me a library and makes a brawl at its very portals."

The attendants, though outwardly grave, sensible-looking men, had by this time joined in the general merriment. I felt a little hurt in mind as well as in body. "Sir," said I, with as much dignity as I could muster, "this is not generous."

"Poh," said Johnson, "a tumble does no man any harm. Sir (*turning to Temple*) you are doubtless acquainted with your Virgil: *Procumbit humi Boz.*"

I cannot pretend that this sally furnished me with any great consolation at the time, but even as I rubbed my shins, which had suffered considerable abrasions, I could not but marvel at the felicitous rapidity with which my friend's scholarship could apply itself to the most trivial occasion.

When we reached the Catalogue Room, there was vividly brought to my mind that saying of my uncle, Dr Boswell, concerning Johnson: 'A robust genius, born to grapple with whole libraries.' For, turning his back upon us, he began immediately to pore over a row of books in one of the recesses. With his eyes close to the pages he was, I could see, intent upon tearing the heart out of as many books as the period of our visit would

allow. I ventured to direct his attention to some of the beauties of the ceiling and of the wood-carving which Temple had indicated to me. But it was of no avail. "Sir," said he, "a man who enters a library should come to read books, not to open his mouth wide at gew-gaws of wood and stone."

However, having detached Johnson for a moment from the books, I signalled to Temple and he led us up a staircase into a lofty room finely lighted at the eastern end by a tall escutcheoned window and presenting an appearance of that dignity which befits an antient University. On each side were roomy and elegant recesses where study might be pursued in an atmosphere of tranquil contemplation, and above them were galleries which, in the distance, appeared to be similar repositories of learning.

In one of the recesses we observed a grave divine intent upon some work of exegesis. I peeped over his shoulder and saw that he was engaged upon a commentary on the Book of Amos; Mr Temple whispered to us that this portion of the Library was especially devoted to theology.

"Ay," said Johnson, as he reverently

handled a folio, "these are the monuments of great Englishmen." I recollected how in one of the *Idler* papers my friend had remarked that English divines and commentators had outstripped those of all other nations and my heart glowed with the thought that the great Ogden might have gained inspiration for his *Sermons* from the very folios we were then contemplating.

At the end of the room we passed a massive statue of His late Majesty, George II. Johnson gave me a queer look.

"Sir," said I, "there would appear to be a lengthy inscription here."

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "I once wrote some lines upon that subject myself; I have no wish to burden myself with the lucubrations of a less candid writer."

The next door that we approached bore a curious legend. I surmised at first that it was some private symbol.

Johnson peered at it with a close attention: ROOM Λ, LEADING TO ROOM Θ.

BOSWELL. Sir, there is something mystical here.

JOHNSON. No, Sir, it is very plain. An antient library will not suffer its parts to be

designated by the common numerical method. It chooses rather a classick alphabet, knowing that an educated man will understand.

When we had passed through the door, Johnson had still further cause for gratification, for we found ourselves in a small room devoted entirely to dictionaries and other works of reference. I quickly sought out a copy of the DICTIONARY and Johnson was visibly pleased to see his own work in a place of honour.

"Sir," said I, "I am reminded of the occasion of our visit to Lord Scarsdale's seat at Keddlestone: *Quae terra nostri non plena laboris.*"

"Sir," said Johnson, "I am obliged to you," and at once proceeded to burrow amongst the folios, taking particular notice of the *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* of Ephraim Chambers, a writer for whom he had always expressed the highest admiration. I could not but feel a glow of satisfaction at beholding the Great Lexicographer thus standing in relief against a background of dictionaries.

When we finally reached the room denominated Θ, we found it to be a room re-

served for the students of manuscripts and select books. I surmised to Johnson that we were now in the very workshop of learned authorship.

"Ay," said he, "here is what I had in mind when I wrote of 'the shelter of academick bowers.' These are the multipliers of books. They will ransack a hundred volumes to make a fresh one."

As we returned, Johnson stopped to look at certain rare books and manuscripts which were carefully preserved in glass cases. While we lingered, a gentleman of benevolent aspect, whom I took to be one of the keepers of the books, came up to us and with an air of great politeness asked whether we were interested in books of particular rarity. Having ascertained that we were so disposed, "Come along," said he, "and I will shew you something of especial interest. Here is a copy of the first edition of *Lycidas* with corrections in Milton's own hand."

"Sir," said Johnson coldly, "I make no doubt that the poem required them."

Somewhat abashed, our guide withdrew; and, dreading lest worse might befall, I led my friend out of the building.

Fenner's and the Market-place

AS we left the University Library, we stood for a while in contemplation of the beautiful gateway leading into the college named Gonville and Caius. Mr Temple informed us that this was known as the Gate of Honour, since students of the college passed through it to the Senate-house for the receiving of their degrees.

Johnson turned to Temple. "I would wager," said he, "that if Boz here had been a Caius man, his shadow would never have darkened this gateway."

I was about to make a spirited reply when an amiable young man, whose countenance seemed to me familiar, approached us. He saluted us in an engaging manner and holding out his hand to Johnson said, "Sir, I believe I had the honour to welcome you at

the Union Society some time ago. I was President at the time."

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "I do not always recollect the faces of young men very clearly, but I very well recollect your hospitality on that occasion."

"Will you not then," replied the young man, "do me the further honour of taking luncheon with me in the Society's dining-room?"

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "your invitation is indeed a generous one, but I had thought that your Society was a debating club and not a tavern."

"Sir," replied the young man, "are the two then incompatible? I have heard that the characteristick qualities of both are combined at the Turk's Head."

Johnson was manifestly pleased at this and, having bade farewell to Temple, who was engaged in his own college, we proceeded to the premises of the Debating Club.

After a comfortable repast our host whispered to me, "Has Dr Johnson ever been to Fenner's?"

"No, Sir," I replied, "he has never travelled in Italy, I think."

At this the young man looked at me in perplexity and said, "I think you misunderstand me. Fenner's is the University Cricket Ground."

"I beg your pardon," said I, feeling considerably flustered and being conscious that I had indulged in somewhat copious libations of Union ale, "I fear that I misapprehended your enquiry, which I thought related to *Venice*."

Our young friend thereupon laughed very heartily and Johnson broke in: "Come, come, what is this joke between you? If there is some frolick that you young dogs are contriving, I'll be one of you."

"It is hardly a frolick, Sir," said the young man, "I was enquiring whether it would be agreeable to you to pay a visit to the cricket match in which the University is this afternoon engaged. Perhaps you played at Oxford, Sir?"

JOHNSON. Nay, Sir, I occupied myself on occasions in sliding on Christ-church meadows, but I have never considered myself to be a very athletick man.

BOSWELL. But, Sir, were you not complimented once at Brighthelmstone upon the manner of your riding to hounds?

JOHNSON. Sir, what has that to do with it?

BOSWELL. Sir, I am not well acquainted with the game of cricket, but I would wager that I have heard the news-writers speak of "an afternoon's leather-hunting."

JOHNSON. Sir, there is no depth of foolish metaphor to which a news-writer will not sink—But, come, let us hear more of this young man's project. I am willing to go and watch this cricket sport for a while, if it be not too tedious.

We thereupon made our way through the town in the direction of the cricket-field. As we went, Johnson insisted, though it was not on the direct route, on going through the market-place. He wanted, he said, to see the full tide of Cambridge life. Our guide very courteously objected that, as it was not a market day, we should not see much evidence of business.

"Never mind that," said Johnson, "a market-place is the meeting-ground of men."

On our arrival we found that the young man was right. There was very little sign of trafficking, but one of the few booths which had been erected turned out to be a book-stall, and to this Johnson immediately made

his way. In a few minutes he was engaged in earnest conversation with the stall-keeper.

"Do you make a good trade of this?" asked Johnson.

"Mustn't grumble, Sir," replied the bookseller, a decent, swarthy man who seemed to love his books and not to plague his customers to buy. "Of course, people don't buy books like they used to, but still, I mustn't grumble."

"Ah," said Johnson, "I grumbled once about standing at a stall. . . ." My esteemed friend was silent for a moment.

"Now, Sir," said the bookseller, "perhaps this would be something that you would fancy," and he reached his hand towards an elegant folio, "there, you can have that for thirty shillings and there's not a shop in London where you wouldn't pay three pounds for it."

No better choice could have been made, for it was a fine copy of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, not the first edition, but a good early one.

"Sir," said Johnson, "you are well skilled in your trade. For you have offered me the one book that ever took me out of bed two

hours earlier than I wished to rise." He felt in his pocket and pulled out some silver. "Boz," he said, "can you lend me a guinea?" I was taken somewhat by surprise, but durst not refuse, and so we walked off across the market-place; Johnson carrying the folio under his arm in triumph and looking as if he were prepared to knock anyone down with it, if the occasion should arise.

When we reached the cricket-ground, the spectacle was indeed an agreeable one. The sun shone through the surrounding trees and the cream cloaths of those engaged in the pastime (some of them wearing curiously-coloured round caps) made a picturesque contrast against the spacious green lawn upon which the game was played.

As we took our seats in the pavilion, a gentleman turned to me and enquired whether I had a card. "Nay, Sir," I replied with some dignity, thinking that he referred to a card of admission, "I am a guest."

The gentleman smiled and said, "Sir, you misapprehend me. I had in mind the card on which the latest score is indicated."

I begged pardon and gave my attention to the card which was then presented to me.

I must confess that I was not much enlightened. I could make out a list of names relating to each side in the contest with figures appended which I understood to relate to the points registered by the respective players; but as for the various symbols such as *c & b*, *lbw* and the like, I remained completely mystified. Johnson, on the other hand, affected to take a lively interest in the game and, when one of the players struck the ball with such vigour as to send it high over the heads of everyone until it dropped clear of the grass just in front of where we sate, he clapped his hands as loud as any.

"Ah, that's the first six I've seen hit for some time," said my neighbour.

"Six what, Sir?" I asked.

"Why, Sir, six runs."

"But, Sir," said I, "I do not understand. I observed the striker narrowly and he scarcely ran at all."

All the spectators had now become so attentive to the game again that no answer was vouchsafed to me and I remained in wonderment. Then immediately followed a great shout.

"Oh, beautiful ball, beautiful ball," cried

my neighbour in a rapturous tone. What beauty there could be in the insignificant-looking ball employed in the game I was at a loss to perceive, but I did not care to risk another snub. Moreover, Johnson plucked me by the arm and said, "Do you not see, Sir, that he's bowled?"

I was on the point of remarking that the players must indeed have courage to indulge in such a game, but at that moment all the cricketers were seen to be advancing towards the pavilion and it appeared that one stage of the game (denominated an "innings") was now concluded. Johnson thereupon, to the manifest surprise of the company, quietly proceeded to open his *Anatomy of Melancholy* and to engage himself in its perusal. I caught the eye of our young friend and signalled to him privily that it would be better for us to depart. He moved towards Johnson: "Sir," he said, "I trust that the spectacle of a cricket-match has not been irksome to you."

"Sir," replied Johnson, "that man is little to be envied whose enthusiasm for manly sports would not gain force upon the plain of Fenner's."

An Honorary Degree

OF the many tributes paid to the wide learning of my illustrious friend, I think there was none which gave him greater pleasure than the degrees which were conferred upon him first by the University of Dublin and afterwards by his own University.

It was therefore with a particular sense of gratification that Johnson received, as I sate at breakfast with him one day about noon, a packet containing an intimation that the University of Cambridge proposed also to confer upon him a Doctorate, *honoris causa.*

"Sir, sir," he cried, "only once before have I discovered myself to be at a loss for a word in the English tongue. Sir, I am *pénétré* with the Vice-Chancellour's goodness."

I was myself raised to a high pitch of enthusiasm by this announcement.

BOSWELL. Sir, you will be thrice a Doctor of Laws.

JOHNSON. No, Sir.

BOSWELL. Nay, Sir, but already—

JOHNSON. Sir, this latest proposal has nothing to do with the law—neither have I, but I flatter myself that I have at least some acquaintance with letters; and it is a doctorate of letters that they offer me.

BOSWELL. That, Sir, shews great sensibility of perception.

JOHNSON. No, Sir, sheer generosity.

He thereupon sate down to compose a suitable reply to the University authorities and when the day preceding that of our departure arrived he shewed a greater concern for the appearance of his cloaths than I had ever before observed. He gave particular injunctions to his servant, Frank, concerning the polishing of his silver shoe-buckles and furnished himself with a Paris-made wig, of handsome construction.

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The door of the Vice-Chancellour's residence was opened to us by a solemn man dressed in black, who might have been the *fac-totum* of an archdeacon. We were duly presented not only to the Vice-Chancellour and many other bearers of office in the Uni-

versity, but also to the Chancellour himself, a statesman of great eminence whose interest on a previous occasion I had endeavoured to secure on behalf of the Corsicans; he had, however, appeared to be somewhat lukewarm on that subject.

"Ah, Dr Johnson," he said, "I am very glad to see you."

"Sir," said Johnson, bowing as low as I had ever seen him except on the occasion of his presentation to a Royal Duke, "Sir, I am indeed sensible of the honour of being welcomed by one who is not only a man of affairs, but a philosopher."

"Dr Johnson," replied the Chancellour, "you are more fortunate than I. You come from a city of philosophers, whereas I only come from Scotland. But, like Mr Boswell there, I fear I cannot help it."

I was highly gratified at being thus drawn into a conversation between two such eminent men, but my hopes of pursuing it were cut short by a general move to the college hall, where we found an elegant repast prepared for us.

One of the other recipients of an honorary degree was a general who had conducted his

campaign in the late fighting in Flanders with great distinction. At the entrance to the hall, he courteously made way for Johnson to precede him. "Come, Dr Johnson," he cried, "my rank counts for nothing today. I am no match for you in Latin, but I recollect a phrase from my school years—*Cedant arma togae.*"

"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "a maker of dictionaries is as nothing to a victorious general. If you and I were to stand in the court yonder, with a throng of students about us and I were to say, 'Follow me and hear a lecture on philology,' and you, laying your hand upon your sword, were to say, 'Follow me and dethrone the Sultan,' they would be ashamed to follow me."

When the banquet was concluded, we were warned that we should shortly be required to assemble for the ceremony in the Senate-house. Here I had for a time to part company with my illustrious friend, as it was necessary for him to take part in the procession of University officers and other dignitaries.

I was, however, conducted by an agreeable man who, as it appeared, was accus-

tomed to undertake the duty of usher in the Senate-house on important occasions. We entered by a side door and I observed, with pleasure as well as with surprise, that there was a considerable number of ladies assembled on the benches opposite. My companion obligingly placed me next to a lively lady who quickly introduced herself to me. "Ah," said she, "you are Mr Boswell. I had been hoping that you would come in fancy dress."

I was pleased to reflect that the story of my display on a former occasion at Stratford-on-Avon should have reached the ears of Cambridge folk.

Our conversation was however interrupted by the appearance of the Chancellour at the door, preceded by two officers designated, as my female companion informed me, Esquire Beadles. The solemnity of mien displayed by these officials, as they entered carrying maces of silver in their hands, filled me with an admiration mingled with awe.

A general cheering now began, but when the great rolling figure of Doctor Johnson was seen, I was gratified to notice that the applause perceptibly increased in volume, es-

pecially in the galleries where the undergraduate members of the university were assembled.

I was not a little astonished at the licence permitted to these gay young fellows. Johnson's entrance provoked many lively sallies, but unfortunately I was unable to distinguish them clearly. I did however catch a question which sounded like "Have you had oatmeal for breakfast?"

By this time, however, the learned Professors and Doctors, whose scarlet robes presented a spectacle which deeply imprinted itself upon my memory, had settled themselves in their places and the Proctors were engaged in reducing the galleries to silence.

When Johnson was conducted by the Publick Oratour to the Chancellour for the conferment of the degree, the storm broke out with renewed violence. The students indulged in cheer after cheer and some of the more frolicksome spirits released small coloured balloons which, floating down on to the grey heads of the doctors of divinity, presented a scene of such comical incongruity that I indulged in a burst of laughter in which my lady friend heartily joined.

Silence being again secured, the Oratour began his speech. No man was more careful of his Latinity than Johnson and I observed that he followed every word with the minutest attention, nodding his head as each period was completed. I caught a few phrases (*summa verborum elegantia . . . sententiarum gravitas . . . supremum litterarum nostrarum dictatorem*) but I must candidly own that I did not follow the oration with the same continuity of understanding, being somewhat distracted by the charmer at my side who whispered "Don't pretend that you can understand it, Mr Boswell. You know you would rather be talking with me." Which I confess was not far from the truth.

When the formula of admission had been finally pronounced over Johnson by the Chancellour, the climax of undergraduate merriment was reached, for to my amazement a gigantick tea-pot fashioned out of cardboard and suspended by a string from either gallery was lowered to within a few feet of Johnson's kneeling figure. Even Johnson seemed for a moment to be taken aback, but he quickly joined in the general laughter and, directing himself towards each

gallery in turn, made a series of bows with great good-humour. Cheering again began coupled with frequent calling upon Johnson's name. One amiable youth who sate in that portion of the gallery immediately opposite me, even added: "Good old Bozzy!" I was quite carried away by this spontaneous expression of good-fellowship and, rising up in my seat, waved my hat towards my unknown friend with the greatest hilarity. Seeing, however, that the stern eye of one of the Beadles was fixed somewhat reproachfully upon me, I hastily resumed my seat.

When the ceremony was concluded, I came upon Johnson surrounded by a crowd of eager students. "Sir," said I, "this has been for me an unforgettable day; and the circumstance of the Oratour's speech being delivered in Latin must have been for you a source of especial gratification."

JOHNSON. Sir, it was a generous speech; but amongst men of scholarship Latin is the customary vehicle of formal expression. Had the ceremony been defaced by an English oration, I should not have taken the degree.

There was a general laugh at this, as we

made our way to the Vice-Chancellour's roomy equipage which was awaiting us in the street.

This was the last, and the most memorable, occasion on which my esteemed friend visited the University of Cambridge.

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